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ABSTRACT

An analysis of interpersonal communication research supports the existence of the notion "communicative style," the method or manner by which an individual interacts with others. Scholars concerned with interpersonal behavior acknowledge that individuals develop habitual styles of interactive behavior that tend to produce optimal relations for them. Although communicative style was linked historically to elocution, an art form divorced from message content, the recent interest of communication scholars in the nonverbal aspects of human communication behaviors has refocused their attention on communicator style. This style is seen to develop as a result of continuous and successive communicative acts during which people learn to be more effective and interpersonally attractive. (RL)

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A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF COMMUNICATOR STYLE

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Abstract:

This paper presents a theoretical analysis of Communicative style with an extensive review of the literature documenting the concept. The paper presents a rationale for individualistic styles and how behaviorally the interactive style of communication is developed thru continuous and successive interactions. The paper focuses on the two principal functions of communicator style: effectiveness and interpersonal attractiveness.

A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF COMMUNICATOR STYLE

Introduction

Style has been traditionally viewed from a syntactical perspective. A review of texts concerned with interpersonal, public, and group communication, reveal that when the discussion of the concept is included, it is almost exclusively related to word selection and arrangement. Recent nonverbal concerns in human communicative behavior give emphasis to style as an interpersonal interactive dimension of paralinguistics. The message source often is sending more than one message. The verbal message is regarded as the content while the nonverbal message creates a medium and/or a context in which the verbal message is presented. Research suggests additional interactive behaviors that are not exclusively verbal or nonverbal which Mahl and Schulze (1964) classify as extralinguistic, e.g., duration of speech, rate of speech, rate of interaction, latency of response, and related communication cues. These extralinguistic traits, along with the verbal and nonverbal elements, influence communication.

Recent research has indicated that individuals possess particular expressive styles of interpersonal interaction (Bienvenu, 1971; Miller, 1975; Mortensen, 1972; Norton,

1974a, 1974b; Norton and Miller, 1975; Stein and Lenrow, 1970). These expressive dimensions, i.e., "style" are conceived of as general orientations toward the reality of self and the environment. Allport (1937, p. 48) refers to this expressive dimension of personality as the "dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment." Eisenson, Auer, and Irwin (1963, p. 333) make application of this concept noting that "Personality is the expression of the individual's values and attitudes that are modified, if not initially shaped by interaction with a culture at large and a subculture in particular. . . .It is an expression of reaction to key persons and to established and expected patterns of behavior." Ruesch (1949, 1957, 1968) maintains that an individual's "method of communication" is established and relatively enduring by adulthood.

Style reflects individual variations of preferred general modes of organizing a stimulus and interacting with it. "Persons generally vary their behavior in accord with the interactional conditions obtaining . . . favored interpersonal 'styles' distinctive for them by virtue of the frequency and generality. . . . 'Style' . . . may be thought of as a discernible tendency to enact sets falling preponderantly within a particular range of interpersonal

behavior," (Carson, 1969, p. 142).

The "style" that an individual develops to use in the presentation of self to relatives, friends, and acquaintances, " . . . implies that there are two kinds of reaction: (a) those which determine what, in a given situation, an individual will do, and (b) those which influence the reactions or effects on others," (Eisenson, et al., 1963, p. 333). Duncan (1962), greatly influenced by the writings of Kenneth Burke, argues that "style itself is an aspect of identification." O'Brien (1974) notes that developing a style of communication that is individually characteristic is necessary for interpersonal encounters. Allport (1955, p. 78) develops the latter point further, "A personal style is a way of achieving definiteness and effectiveness in our self-image and in our relationships with other people."

Kendon (1967) notes in his research that individuals rely on "old and well established speech habits" supporting Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) concepts of established behavioral sequences and repertoires. Ervin-Tripp (1964) maintains that every individual functions out of his or her established behavioral sequences and repertoires as a personal constant in a variety of interactive situations. Giffin and Patton (1974, pp. 66-67) explain this method of communicative response as a matter of latitude in the communicator's style.

> Some people appear to have a narrow or rigid orientation to all or nearly all others in about the same way. On

the other hand, many persons have a wider repertoire of responses, and can appropriately react in different ways to differing interpersonal behaviors of others.

For the purpose of this research, the term communicator style is used generally in reference to the method or manner by which an individual interacts with others. This concept encompasses paralinguistics, extralinguistics, behavior sequences and repertoires, and communication cues that distinguish the way in which a message is presented from the content.

Review of Literature

Numerous studies have been conducted in departments of anthropology, education, psychology, social psychology, sociology, and speech communication concerning the interactive behaviors of interpersonal relations within a small group setting. The most conclusive adjective we can use to describe that interactive behavior seems to be "dynamic" which implies, as Lewin (1935, 1936) proposed, a psychophysical system in which activity becomes a force or power which alters the relationship. Chapple (1939, 1970) maintains that this interactive behavior can be best explained as a factor of interpersonal compatibility. Each individual has established a particular set of expressive behaviors, i.e., communicator style, which is employed when interacting with others to achieve a particular goal (Birdwhistell, 1970; Brown and Van Riper, 1966; Cooley, 1902). Thus, the use of

this accumulated set of interpersonal expressive behaviors can be strategically employed. This research is concerned with what Brockriede (1968) describes as a "broad symbolic strategy" namely, a macroscopic view of style.

Traditional research has dealt with differences in delivery. Dietrich (1946) notes that a conversational style is more effective than a dynamic style; Thomas (1956) concludes that oral style has a positive effect on comprehension when compared with a written style; and Bettinghaus (1961) reports that an effective delivery produced more attitude change than an ineffective delivery. Putnam and O'Hern (1955) and Harms (1961) conclude that social status and credibility judgements are influenced by delivery. Leginski and Izzett (1973) suggest that the message content of the interaction is less influential than the linguistic style. Gordon (1969) asserts that the style of communication may have a greater influence than the content of the interaction. Miller (1975, p. 2) comments "In terms of social success and acceptability, the adage ["It's not what you say, but how you say it that counts."] implies that what interactants talk about and the position(s) they take are less important than how they present their views."

Consequents of Communicator Style

An abundant but fragmented body of research suggests

recurring relationships among paralinguistic and extra-linguistic variables. Two of the most frequent consequents of this research deal with effectiveness and attractiveness.

Effectiveness. The preponderance of research has reported that the aggressive, talkative, dominant, or simply the more active participant is more effective in interpersonal encounters. Mann (1959) found that verbally aggressive or dominant persons have a significantly greater chance of being designated leader. Talkative persons control conversations (Pope and Seigman, 1966); focus contributions to task areas (Bales, 1956; Strodtbeck and Mann, 1956; Watson, 1965); contribute more ideas to group objectives and influence the adoption of ideas (Jackson, 1966; Riecken, 1958). Bales (1970) found dominance to be a covariate of talkativeness. Further, the dominant person causes other members in the group to feel that their power has been substantially reduced (McGrath, 1964). The research mentioned above represents the attempts to connect style to an observable variable, effectiveness.

Attractiveness. The preponderance of research indicates that the receptive, encouraging, and friendly participant is more attractive in interpersonal encounters. Stass and Willis (1967) and Mehrabian (1968) report that males and females respond more positively to individuals who look at them when communicating. Holstein, Goldstein,

and Bem (1971) report that smiling behavior correlates positively with attractiveness. Lerner (1965) found that vocal quality affects attractiveness. Mehrabian (1969) reported closer distances between individuals attractive to one another. Attractiveness has been noted empirically as a usable resource in social influence (French and Raven, 1959; Horai, Naccari, and Fatoullah, 1974; Mills and Aronson, 1965; Mills and Harvey, 1972; Snyder and Rothbart, 1971; and Tedeschi, 1972). Interpersonal attraction implies more than a simple evaluative reaction to physical attributes, it is but one antecedent to interpersonal attractiveness (Berschied and Walster, 1974). Interpersonal attraction involves interpersonal association (Byrne, 1971; Cooley, 1909; Jennings, 1950; Moreno, 1934; and Newcomb, 1961). Lott, Lott, Reed, and Crow (1970, p. 285) develop this associative concept by noting that "liked persons . . . evoke anticipations of pleasant consequences . . . [and] are expected to mediate behavior of an approach nature." Eisenson, Auer, and Irwin (1963, p. 341) note that we "assess persons by their speech behavior; we seek the company of some and avoid the company of others . . . if our empathic reactions make us uncomfortable, we are apt to avoid the cause of discomfort. If our empathic reactions are comfortable, we are likely to seek the source in the future." Simons (1973, p. 218) notes that "attraction of a subject to a stimulus person increases

as the proportion of his reported attitudinal similarities to the subject increases." This is further documented by the research findings of Byrne, 1961a, 1961b; Byrne, Clore, and Worchel, 1966; Byrne and Griffitt, 1966; Byrne, Griffitt, and Golightly, 1966; Byrne and London, 1966; Byrne and McGraw, 1964; Byrne and Nelson, 1965a, 1965b; Byrne, Nelson, and Reeves, 1966; Byrne and Rhamey, 1965; Byrne and Wong, 1962; Jones and Daugherty, 1959; McWhirter and Jecker, 1967; Schacter, 1951; Scott, 1973; Sheffield and Byrne, 1967; Smith, 1957; and Touhey, 1973. Dion, Berschied, and Walster (1972) concluded that interpersonally attractive individuals were socially desirable, reporting that attractive persons were perceived as more sincere, more stable, and warmer. The research mentioned above, represents the attempts to connect style to an observable, interpersonal attractiveness. Research by Norton, Pettegrew, and Land (1975) and Norton and Pettegrew (1975) reports a positive relationship between communicator style and interpersonal attractiveness. However, this research has limited generalization because it did not involve interpersonal interaction.

The Relationship Between Effectiveness and Attractiveness.

Individuals who share attitudes and values, provide one another with social support for their opinions, which makes their association attractive, particularly if minor variations in their orientations contribute a challenge to their

discussion of the issue. Newcomb (1956, 1961) proposed that interpersonal attraction between individuals is a function of the extent to which reciprocal rewards are present in their interaction. Research conducted by Byrne and Nelson (1965a), and Byrne and Griffitt (1966) report a linear relationship between attraction and positive reinforcements. Aronson and Linder (1965) and Sigall and Aronson (1967), manipulating the order of positive and negative reinforcements, found that positive reinforcements resulted in a gain of esteem, which in turn, resulted in increased attraction for the person giving the positive reinforcement. The experiment by Aronson and Linder (1965) was designed to determine if changes in O's reaction toward P (changing from a negative to a positive attitude) have a greater effect on P's attraction to O than a continuous positive attitude. The results indicated that changes in attitude, especially from negative to positive, resulted in significantly greater attraction than the no-change, and positive-positive conditions.

The interaction of personality and social structure or "communicator style" now becomes explicable by examining (a) the degree to which a given social system provides opportunities for social reinforcement and (b) the degree to which each individual's behavior can be influenced by the application of that reinforcement. Optimally organized groups

will provide rewards that can be instrumental to the participation of all in the group process, thus sustaining adequate performance and morale. However, as Watson (1971) notes, dominant subjects sent twice as many directive messages, creating a social structure in which the dominant individual controlled the reinforcment or rewards thus influencing the interactive behavior of others.

Lowe and Goldstein (1970) investigated the relationship between attraction and perceived ability. Subjects issuing positive evaluations were perceived to be high in ability and thus attractive. Borgatta, Cottrell, and Mann (1958) reported that the two factors accounting for the major portions of variance were assertiveness and sociability. McCroskey, Weiner, and Hamilton (1975) conclude that specific interaction behaviors may increase ratings in one dimension while contributing to a decrease in another. They reported that talkativeness correlated positively with social attraction and negatively with task attraction.

Rationale

This research considers communicator style predictors in relation to the effectiveness and attractiveness variables. An individual's style becomes more or less habitual as a consequence of experience (Secord and Backman, 1961). It seems reasonable that an individual would adopt an interpersonal style which produces, on the average, outcomes optimal for relations with others.

When an individual engages in an interaction with others, they commonly seek information about him or recall information about him already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc. Although some of this information seems to be sought almost as an end in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what will be expected of them and what they may expect of others. Informed in these ways, the individual will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from others. As Erving Goffman (1959, p. 2) notes, "the expressiveness of the individual appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he gives [content] and the expression that he gives off [style]." Cherry (1966, p. 267) explains this "sign activity" which Goffman makes reference to as:

> . . . a sign sets up two kinds of reaction in a recipient--overt response and other internal changes in the state of his nervous system correlating with a changed state of mind. [a sign] . . . should stimulate its recipient into making some response which itself may be capable of acting as a sign for the object signified . . . A sign is such that it stands in triadic relation to an object (designatum) by stimulating the recipient into making a response which itself is capable of standing in the same triadic relation to the same object. In everyday terms, the first sign calls up a second sign (reply) in the recipient. The second sign in turn calls up a third, and so on in a potentially endless chain.

When an individual appears before others, his actions influence the definition of the situation. A person who is attracted to others is interested in proving himself attractive to them, for his ability to associate with them and reap the benefits expected from the association is contingent on their finding him an attractive associate and thus wanting to interact with him. Their attraction to him, just as his to them, depends on the anticipation that the association will be rewarding. To arouse this anticipation, a person tries to impress others. Attempts to appear impressive are persuasive in the early stages of acquaintance and group formation. Impressive qualities make a person attractive and promise that associating with him will be rewarding (Blau, 1964, p.38).

Blau (1964, p. 43) reasons that a new group provides new opportunities. "[M]embers of a newly forming group, none whose social position is more insecure than that of the rest, . . . often resort to more aggressive tactics to establish themselves as valuable associates." Thus, Blau (1964, p. 22) conjectures that, within the first few minutes of a newly formed triad, considerable attention is given by the involved parties to determining the position each will take toward the others with respect to dominance and affection. This exchange process gives rise to differentiation in power.

Carson (1969, p. 102) has summarized a large number of factor analytic investigations that, although not directed toward social influence behaviors per se, attempted to account for the type and amount of general behavior produced in small group interactions.

> . . . the conclusion seems justified that major portions of the domain of interpersonal behavior can profitably and reasonably accurately be considered as involving variations on two independent, bipolar dimensions. One of these may be called dominance-submission dimension; it includes dominant, assertive, ascendent (leading, controlling) behaviors on the one hand, and submissive, retiring, obsequious, unassertive, following (etc.) behaviors, while the latter includes accepting, loving, affectionate, affiliative, friendly (etc.) social actions.

Foa (1961) concluded that the various studies suggested "orthogonal axes of dominance-submission and love-hostility." Hayes and Meltzer (1972, p. 540) explain that "there is strong evidence that the dominance-submission dimension is well indexed by the amount of vocal participation a person contributes during interactions." Coach (1960) showed that the number of "initiations" an individual produced (Bales Code) loaded .96 on this dimension.

The relationship between effectiveness and attractiveness as a function of communicator style is best summarized by Blau (1964, p. 43).

> In a group situation, impressive qualities make a person attractive in one sense and unattractive in another, because they raise fears of rejection and pose a status threat for the rest of the group.

> Since we are most impressed by qualities that are superior to our own and that other people also find impressive, an individual who possesses such qualities may well find that he can impress many others, giving us good reason to fear his rejection.

The research of Feffer and Suchotliff (1966) observed that an individual's ability to distinguish between personal communicative behavior and others' perceptions of that behavior correlate with effective interaction.

Bales (1970) identifies both perceptual abilities and communication characteristics using the revised Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) which places much greater emphasis on the characteristics of the communication than the original, noting that the IPA is "concerned with the form, the manner, or the mode of interpersonal communication" (p. 92). Bales (1970, p. 253) maintains that the IPA classifies "how the persons communicate." Several of the categories in the IPA are distinguished by syntactical structure, e.g., the categorical units for questions and answers; asks and/or gives suggestions, opinions, and information. However, other categories are concerned with stylistic dimensions of behavior such as friendly, dramatizes, reveals tension, and is agreeable, which are not distinguished by syntactical structure but how one communicates. Bales analysis of communication traits suggests, as Miller (1975, p. 15) notes, a relationship between communicator style and social perception.

Assuming the reasoning to be valid, an individual's style of communication should be perceptable to others. Norton and Miller (1975 and Miller (1975) document the perception of communicator style. Miller's (1975, pp. 98-99) results indicate that after a ten minute encounter, strangers possessing a high and middle profile of communicator style (pretest scores) was able to accurately assess other's communicative style. The individuals with a low communicator style however, "do not report perceiving a difference between the way they and high pretest score [r]s communicate." Miller's (p. 100) analysis of the raters' data indicates that the subjects did communicate differently," noting in the specifics that the raters accurately perceived the communicator styles of the subjects, Miller (1975) argues that individuals with a low communicator style score were "perceptually deficient", i.e., not capable to accurately assess the differences in style.

The review of literature overwhelmingly supports the notion of communicative style, which until recently posed a conceptual problem. Scholars concerned with interpersonal behavior felt it adequate to indicate in their observations, that individuals develop habitual styles of interactive behavior which on the average produce optimal relations. Communication scholars traditionally associated style with the "elecutionists" which in the latter nineteen hundreds,

fell into academic disrepute and disregard. Elocution was considered an art form divorced from content. Communication scholars, due to this orientation, focused on the message content and the attributed characteristics of the message source and the receiver. As previously mentioned, recent interest in nonverbal aspects of human communicative behavior give emphasis to communicator style.

Thus an individual does develop their own unique manner of impressive and expressive behavior. This Communicator Style has emerged as a result of continuous and successive communicative acts, learning to be more effective and interpersonally attractive.

The foundation and the development of the CSM construct is presented by Norton (1978) and Miller (1975). Research by Schroeder (1977) documents the relationship between Communicator Style as a function of effectiveness and interpersonal attraction.

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